

UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development

Contribution by Mr Walter Hirche, President of the German Commission for UNESCO, in the First Plenary

Dear chairman Mr. Burnett,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to extend a warm welcome to all of you also on behalf of the German Commission for UNESCO. As part of the organizing team we have had the privilege to cooperate extremely productively with the colleagues in Paris and, of course, the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, who has invited everyone here to Germany. We are delighted and, in fact, overwhelmed that this conference has met with so much interest.

It has been pointed out that Education for Sustainable Development has had particular urgency for quite some time now. In the last few years, the challenges for a just and future-oriented human development have become more prominent, not least through the reports by the intergovernmental panel on climate change. At the moment the global financial crisis is demonstrating especially clearly the catastrophic results that unsustainable practices can have. Causes of the crisis were an exclusively short-term thinking and the refusal to balance out high risks with respective securities. The values, competencies, principles and the knowledge that are promoted by Education for Sustainable Development read like an antidote: ESD fosters a broad sense of responsibility also for people living in other parts of the world as well as for coming generations, anticipatory thinking, risk awareness, and action that is guided by a precautionary principle.

The midterm of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development is the occasion for this conference. Four objectives run through its programme, which has been developed in consultation with an International Advisory Group:

1. To highlight the essential contribution of education for sustainable development to all of education and to achieving quality education. ESD

intends to provide everyone with the opportunity to acquire the competencies, the skills, the orientations and the values that are necessary to actively and responsibly shape a liveable future – a future that allows every person to live a life in dignity. As such it constitutes a comprehensive approach to quality education and learning. This World Conference should draw out the relevance of ESD to education as a whole and its importance for improving the quality of education while attaining Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals.

2. To promote international exchange on ESD. The World Conference will provide an opportunity to share experiences, best practices and views on ESD from around the world. The question of how ESD can meet different regional, national and local as well as global needs will be addressed. Examples of good practice from all over the world will play an important role in identifying viable approaches to ESD. While acknowledging the need to address local and cultural specificities, we will also have the opportunity to explore a vision of ESD that we all share.

3. To carry out a stock-taking of the implementation of the UN Decade. During its first half, the UN Decade of ESD has increasingly gained momentum. The World Conference should provide an opportunity to analyze our strengths and weaknesses in the implementation, celebrate the successes and discuss how to confront the challenges lying ahead on our path to integrate the principle of sustainable development more fully into all of education.

4. To develop strategies for the way ahead. It is important that the analysis of implementation so far leads to the development of new strategies, ensuring the further implementation of the UN Decade in its second half. Strategies for the way forward may include, among others: the further integration of ESD in educational policies, plans and programmes; the mobilization of more resources for ESD; the establishment of effective partnerships (especially through North-South and South-South cooperation) and the inclusion of stakeholders not involved in implementing ESD so far.

Please allow me, in the following, to give a brief overview of the conference programme through which these four objectives will be pursued. I hope this provides some helpful orientation for the coming days.

The ministerial High-level Segment of the conference will take place this afternoon and discuss in depth the relationship between education for sustainable development and quality education, focusing on the diversity of perspectives from around the world as well as on a shared vision. Over 50 ministers will participate in the Segment. The outcomes of this high-level meeting will be reported back to the plenary tomorrow.

Throughout the conference, we will come together here in the plenary hall four times. After today's opening and introductory plenary sessions, the second plenary, which will take place tomorrow morning, is dedicated to a presentation of the draft global report on the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, which UNESCO has put together and from which we have heard the first highlights earlier. This will allow for a very precise stock-taking with regard to what has been achieved. The mid-conference plenary, taking place tomorrow afternoon after the first series of workshops, will provide the opportunity, with the help of the two general rapporteurs, to look back on what has been discussed in the conference up to then. The closing plenary on the afternoon of the third day will synthesize the various issues discussed at the conference and consider its final declaration.

Much of the work in relation to the conference objectives will take place during the thematic workshops prepared and organized by a broad spectrum of dedicated stakeholders. Workshops are grouped into four thematic clusters:

I Relevance of ESD for key sustainable development challenges. The workshops under this heading will examine how education can contribute to addressing issues like water resources, climate change, health, or biodiversity. They will also show how education can be made more relevant, and in fact more attractive to learners, by introducing sustainability issues into all areas of learning.

II Building partnerships to promote ESD. Reorienting education towards sustainable development must be a multi-stakeholder endeavour. ESD takes place not only in education institutions but also in many other sectors of society. Education stakeholders therefore need to reach out to other important actors and build strong partnerships. The workshops in this thematic cluster will address strategic partnerships in this sense.

III Capacity development for ESD. If ESD is to become a central aspect of all education, supporting structures at the global, national and local levels are required. Among other things, this implies political frameworks that enable and promote the inclusion of sustainable development issues and principles into all areas of teaching and learning.

IV ESD and the teaching-learning process. The main thrust of each workshop in this cluster is: how can ESD contribute to improving the quality of teaching-learning processes? The workshops will consider different educational settings and the opportunities they provide for ESD. The important question of how Education for All and ESD relate to each other will also be discussed in this cluster.

The first series of workshops – encompassing workshops in the thematic clusters I and II – will take place this afternoon at 3 pm and will continue tomorrow morning at 11 am. The second series of workshops – mainly on the thematic clusters III and IV – will take place in the morning of the third conference day. Workshops take place in rooms a few steps away from this conference building, generously provided by partner organizations. Please check in the programme brochure where your workshop is located, and assemble half an hour before the start of each workshop at the meeting points in the lobby of this building so that conference staff can guide you. Workshop coordinators should meet one hour before the start of the workshop.

A special contribution to the conference will be the project-based workshops tomorrow afternoon. Right after the mid-conference plenary you will be invited to get on a bus and visit ESD projects in and around the city of Bonn. These off-site workshops will focus on interactively exchanging experiences on the implementation of ESD in practice. For example, you can do a trip on the ship “MS Burgund” and learn how school children are being taught about water quality and research. Or you can visit a centre of excellence for non-formal learning in the context of ESD, in addition to 12 other project-based workshops.

A number of distinguished and respected experts in ESD have agreed to capturing the results of this conference. The entire conference will be followed by the two general rapporteurs, Mary Joy Pigozzi and Kartikeya Sarabhai. Mary Pigozzi is Senior Vice President at the Academy for Educational Development and member

of the UNESCO High-level Panel for the UN Decade. She will capture the plenary sessions and the high-level segment. Kartikeya Sarabhai, Director of the Centre for Environmental Education in Ahmedabad, India, will cover the workshops of the conference. Four rapporteurs for the thematic clusters will contribute to capturing results from the workshops. They are Hilligje Van't Land (Netherlands), Konai Thaman (Fiji), Overson Shumba (Zambia) and Miriam Vilela (Costa Rica). We are very pleased that the rapporteurs have agreed to taking up this important task. *[Alle sechs sitzen schräg links vor dem Rednerpult. Es sollte auf sie verwiesen werden.]* There will of course also be rapporteurs for each workshop, and their reports will not only be submitted to the thematic cluster rapporteurs, they will also be made available to all participants after the conference. All reporting by the rapporteurs should be structured along the four conference objectives. The conference website will extensively document the outcomes after the end of the conference.

The organizers also propose to synthesize the outcomes of this meeting into a final declaration. The drafting group for this declaration would consist of the general rapporteurs as well as of the thematic cluster rapporteurs, of a drafting secretariat, a Japanese expert, given Japan's role as the founding sponsor of the UN Decade, the Assistant Director-General for Education, and three representatives each from the six electoral groups of UNESCO. The group will be chaired by Prof. Charles Hopkins, a deeply experienced advocate for ESD and a member of the Advisory Group of the conference. Maybe the entire drafting group, which sits over here, can briefly stand up, so that everyone can identify them throughout the meeting.

Drafts of the final declaration will be made available on the morning of the second conference day with the possibility to give feedback in the mid-conference plenary and through depositing suggestions at the conference secretariat by 3:30 pm. A second draft will be made available in the evening of the second day upon arrival of the buses from the project-based workshops and in the morning of the third conference day. Feedback should be deposited by 11:00 am at the conference secretariat. The final draft will be available at 2:30 pm on the third day. Input into the drafting process comes mainly from the conference itself; however, the results of previous meetings on ESD will of course also be taken into account, as well as

the youth workshop of the World Conference, which took place yesterday and whose 25 brilliant and dedicated participants will be here for the whole conference.

I hope that this arrangement for the rapporteurs and the drafting meets with your approval.

I would hope that despite this busy conference schedule you will find the time also to take in the remaining elements of the World Conference: the exhibition in the lobby of this building showing 25 ESD projects from different world regions; the special events held during lunch hours and in the early evening; the document centre where a large number of publications have been prepared for you; and of course the reception tonight hosted by the German Federal Minister, the Prime Minister of the Federal State of North-Rhine Westphalia, and the Mayor of Bonn, as well as the farewell party on the last day.

The most important of all aspects of the conference, however, is of course you, decision makers and experts from all over the world who have come here to Bonn. I would like to thank you for coming here and I would also like to particularly extend my gratitude to all those who will be playing an active role or have done so in the preparation process.

If I may I would end on a personal note. My personal wish for the conference would be that we all use this chance that is offering itself to us here to develop new perspectives on education for sustainable development, to engage in fruitful debates in a spirit of mutual learning and understanding, and that in the end, we manage, through a joint effort, to move an education that does justice to the needs of present generations without endangering the needs of future generations further up the international agenda.

I wish you productive days in Bonn.

Thank you for your attention.